

NATIONAL ANIMAL ID BAD FOR INDEPENDENT PRODUCERS

EXHIBIT

10

2/17/09

HB

592

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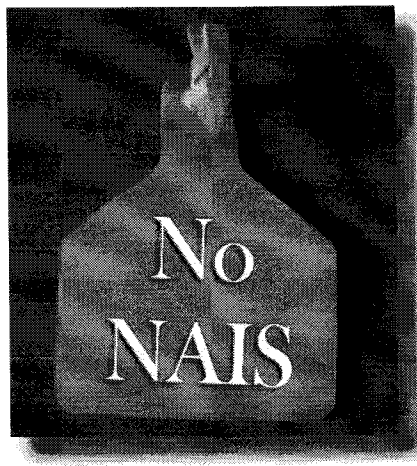
On September 22 a disturbing internal memo from the USDA was released to animal health officials nationwide that directed them to begin involuntary enrollment in the National Animal Identification System (NAIS).

The memo directed veterinary service personnel, which includes state veterinarians, to start aggressively enrolling people in the program, and also directed them to start assigning Premises Identification Numbers (PIN) to those individuals who did not want to be enrolled in the program. The memo said these people would be "flagged accordingly," without explaining what that meant. The memo confirms the fears that many Montana farmers, ranchers, and horse owners have: that the USDA is bent on making this program mandatory.

Many independent livestock producers in Montana oppose a Mandatory National Animal Identification System, and for a myriad of reasons. The program puts a heavy financial and bureaucratic burden on producers with no tangible benefit in return. The program is supposedly intended to aid in tracing diseased

livestock to their ranch of origin, but Montana already has an effective traceback system: branding.

The program would also grant enforcement officers the right to come onto private property to ensure compliance, if it were to ever become mandatory. Though the USDA has stated that the program will be voluntary, it also states that it wants 100% enrollment and will enroll people in the program against their will. These mixed messages have led to calls that the program be eliminated.



R-CALF USA and other groups protested this memo with some degree of success. On December 22, a new USDA memo was posted that alleviated some ranchers' concerns. However, the new December 22 memorandum was even more vague than the original. In it, the USDA acknowledges

that there is an opt-out mechanism for the Animal ID program, but insists that any location with activities that relate to a disease management program, like scrapies or brucellosis, would still be required to have a PIN number. R-CALF has asked the USDA to clarify what this memo means.

Pass HB 551, which would allow Montana state government to participate in NAIS only if it remains voluntary and non-coercive.

TERMS YOU SHOULD KNOW:

Premises Registration:

Every person who owns any livestock animal would have to register the premises where the livestock is held. Livestock animals include cattle, hogs, sheep and goats, chickens and other poultry, horses, bison, deer and elk, alpacas and llamas.

Animal Identification:

There will be two levels of animal identification: individual animal and lot identification. Most animals in the program would be individually identified with a unique 15-digit number and either implanted with a microchip or tagged with a radio frequency device.

Animal Tracking:

Every time an animal is tagged, a tag is lost or a tag reapplied, an animal dies or is missing, the event would have to be reported to the government within 24 hours. "Commingle events" such as private and public sales, regional shows, and exhibitions will also have to be reported.

NO MANDATORY ID FOR AG ANIMALS



Northern Plains Resource Council's campaign to prevent implementation of a mandatory National Animal Identification System on Montana's livestock and other farm animals.

NATIONAL ANIMAL IDENTIFICATION SYSTEM

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is currently in the process of implementing a National Animal Identification System (NAIS).

NAIS is designed to identify and track each and every individual livestock and poultry animal owned by family farm producers or hobby farmers across the country.

Put forth as a disease tracking and trace back security program, its actual intent is more sinister. NAIS will usurp existing, well-functioning disease response and brand inspection programs run in states, while putting more burden through cost and liability on the shoulders of producers and famers. Furthermore, this program does nothing to serve as a food safety tool for consumers or a disease prevention system for producers.

When this cumbersome and costly plan was met with resistance, USDA "hired" states as their hirelings hoping to entice farmers and ranchers to participate. The farmers and ranchers impacted by this program have added up the costs and understand that USDA has set up an expensive, centralized system that only duplicates tracking systems that already work while doing nothing to stop disease or inform consumers.

LEGISLATORS, PLEASE PASS:

■ **HB 551: NO MANDATED FEDERAL ANIMAL ID** – sponsored by Rep. Dennis Getz (D-Glendive) would prohibit the state from requiring a mandatory National Animal Identification System (NAIS) in Montana. NAIS would require all owners of livestock to register their ranches or homes, microchip every animal, and report all animal movements within 48 hours. NAIS will be expensive for all small livestock owners, invade privacy, does nothing to prevent disease, and will be no more effective at tracing back disease than methods in use now.



Join Northern Plains in fighting this USDA overreach into Montana's ranches. Call Northern Plains at (406) 248-1154 and get on the list of people who will fight for independent producers.

EXHIBIT 10
DATE 2/17/09
HB 597

Members of the Committee-

My name is Mike Scott and I reside at 4907 Jellison Road in Billings, Montana. I can be contacted at 406-839-3333 or mscott151@gmail.com. I operate Blue Creek Boers, a meat goat ranch just south of Billings. I am writing to ask you all to support the legislation before you that would insure that we, Montana's livestock producers, are not forced or coerced to enroll in the National Animal Identification System.

As I am sure you are aware, there is nothing in the proposed legislation that would prevent anyone from enrolling in this program if it makes sense for them. However, for me, this program does not make sense. The profit margins on livestock are slim, and the costs of purchasing a scanner and the compliant tags would eat into our profits enough to make us reconsider our work. I run a small herd of goats and ranching is not my primary job because of these low margins. The NAIS would only continue to eat away at our hard earned money. We do not move a high volume of livestock and instead try to focus on careful breeding for desired carcass characteristics. The NAIS program gives a competitive advantage to vertically integrated industrial livestock companies. Under NAIS rules, they are allowed to use a group ID number instead of tagging each animal. They would not bear the full cost of the program and therefore can sell their products at a lower price than we independent producers could. This is not how a market is supposed to function, and instead is yet another example of the USDA and corporate ag working together to squeeze independent producers out of the market place. We want to compete on an even playing field. We produce a superior product, yet it seems that the designers of the NAIS want to make our product cost prohibitive to the consumer.

I am 29 years old. I have followed a family tradition in getting involved with agriculture again. Though there is wide concern that young people are not getting involved with agriculture, programs like this discourage our involvement. As anyone who has worked a farm or ranch knows, the up front capital investment to began ranching is huge. This program only adds to that burden. While some may choose to be involved in order to get a source verification premium, there is no premium for anyone if the program becomes mandatory to everyone. Therefore, we bear the costs of implementing the program and get nothing in return except increased cost.

Committee members, please tell Washington to quit telling us how to ranch by passing this piece of legislation before you. Please feel free to contact me with any questions or concerns. I thank you, Rep. Getz and Randall, the Montana Cattleman and Northern Plains Resource Council for your action on this important problem.

An Open Letter to the Montana Legislature.

Step by step we are being boxed in as the Dept of Agriculture (USDA) creates rules for their National Animal Identification System (NAIS). It looks like in the coming year we will be required to register our ranch and animals when we vaccinate our heifers for Brucellosis. The proposed rule states that if we do not voluntarily register our ranch, than our veterinarian will do it for us.

I first heard of NAIS when one of Congressman Rehberg's staff members told a room full of ranchers that Animal ID was a train that was a coming and that we had better get used to it. Since that meeting, NAIS has met a fire storm of objections and USDA keeps changing its tune as to why we should love it.

At first we told that Animal IDs were needed to comply to the Country of Origin Law (COOL). That was not true.

At one time, all animals were to be included in one huge data base maintained and controlled by a prominent national beef organization. This included dogs, cats, canaries, and backyard chickens. The back yard chickens are still on the list but how we are supposed to keep a radio chip tags in their ears has not been explained. We are also still not sure who will administrate the data base.

Then we were told that this was needed to market our calves. I noticed that last fall the buyer of my calves put his own radio chip ear tags in the calves before loading. If he wants to waste his time and money – well that is his business.

Now USDA has declared that NAIS is actually designed to prevent and control disease outbreaks. At least this is a real reason and one that we should carefully evaluate before accepting or rejecting animal ID.

Although USDA has told us that NAIS will help them respond to disease outbreaks they have not explained why this program will be better than what veterinarians have worked with in the past. Recent incidences of Brucellosis in Montana have been efficiently dealt with and we need to commend our State Veterinarian for a job well done.

Would radio chipped cows made the vet's job easier – maybe? It might have made it harder if the computerized information was all balled up and tangled. Technology when it works is marvelous. When it doesn't work you may have to spend hours on the phone with some guy named Raji in India.

One thing one can say for hot iron brands and tattoos is that they are visible and simple. They don't require a \$1000 wand to read and another \$1000 computer to interpret the information. And we don't need to wake up Raji in the middle of his night to find out why we can't get the data from the wand to the computer.

Brucellosis is a slow moving disease so I am not very sympathetic with the argument that the vet authorities need to trace down all of herd mates in 24 hours. The old way may be slow and time consuming but it works.

For other diseases such as Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) that may not be the case. Interestingly enough, FMD is not on the list of disease that USDA plans to address with the animal ID system. Perhaps this is because an outbreak of FMD will be a true emergency and the immediate response will be a total ban on livestock movements. It doesn't matter where they came from it only matters whether they are currently infected and that they do not go somewhere else to infect other animals.

My hunch is that one of the pushes from the veterinary side for NAIS is that it seems like a good idea - the technology exists so we should be using the technology. This is not a good enough reason why all animal owners in the United States must buy \$3.00 radio chips for all of their animals, buy a wand reader, buy a computer, buy the appropriate software, buy an internet connection (the data store is internet based) and register his farm or ranch with the US government with another damn number that he can't remember.

If NAIS is a good idea and will help eradicate and control animal diseases I am willing to be convinced, but so far I have not read or heard anything that honestly explains how NAIS will benefit me. I am also willing to accept the notion that NAIS might be the right technology for other segments of the industry. Maybe this is exactly what is needed to control TB and Johne's Disease in dairy cattle. We should let the Dairy people tell us if this is the case.

However, for range cattle in Montana I see this program as just a pain in the neck and an unnecessary expense. That is why I was happy to learn that the Montana Legislature is considering a bill that will instruct the Dept of Livestock from getting involved with any Mandatory NAIS programs.

We have the time to think this through and since we have not had straight answers from USDA there is no reason why we should buy in until we do.

Gilles Stockton

Grass Range